



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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Family of a Man Who Died From West Nile Virus Working to Raise Awareness of the Disease

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health and family members of a man who died from West Nile virus he became ill with in 2012 joined together this morning to raise awareness about how severe this disease can be. Kim Rath, 58, of Wishek, N.D., died Feb. 8, 2013, after an extensive illness with West Nile virus. His family today shared their story at a news conference held in Bismarck.

The North Dakota Department of Health is charged with keeping specific information about individuals confidential; however, Kim Rath's family asked the department to discuss his death in order to educate and raise awareness about the seriousness of West Nile virus disease. Bridgette Readell participated with the department in a news conference held today to talk about her dad's struggle with the illness.

"Our dad became ill in August with flu-like symptoms that within days progressed to where he needed to be placed in the intensive care unit and put on a ventilator," said Bridgette. "West Nile virus has not only affected our family, but so very many other families across North Dakota. We have friends in many communities who struggle daily because of how West Nile virus has changed their health and their lives. Mosquitoes who carry the disease aren't choosy about their victims; therefore, infection of West Nile Virus can happen to anyone."

On June 1, 2013, the North Dakota Department of Health – in conjunction with several local, state, federal and private agencies – will begin coordination of West Nile virus surveillance activities. With the beginning of a new West Nile virus season we are reminded about the seriousness of West Nile virus infection.

"We are saddened about the death of Kim from his West Nile virus infection, and we extend our sympathy to the family," said Michelle Feist, West Nile Program manager with the North Dakota

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Department of Health. “Unfortunately, this is a tragic reminder of just how serious West Nile virus illness can be for some people and why it is so important to take precautions to prevent infection.”

West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. In North Dakota, the greatest risk for West Nile virus transmission occurs during the months of July and August when the *Culex tarsalis* mosquito, the mosquito that transmits the disease, is more abundant.

“Most people infected with West Nile virus experience no symptoms or have only mild symptoms such as fever and headaches,” Feist said. “More severe infection may result in high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, altered mental state and death. It is important for people to take precautions now and throughout the summer months to protect themselves.”

In 2012, 89 West Nile virus cases in humans were reported to the Department of Health, with one death. Additionally, West Nile infection was identified in 14 horses, two birds and one dog. It’s also important to note that since surveillance started in 2002, a human case has been reported in every county in the state.

The best protection against West Nile virus infection is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. People are encouraged to take the following protective measures:

- Use insect repellents containing ingredients registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – such as DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus (or PMD) or permethrin – and apply according to manufacturer’s instructions.
- Wear protective clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts and pants.
- Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most likely to bite.
- Eliminate stagnant water in containers around homes where mosquitoes can lay their eggs (such as buckets, flowerpots, old tires, wading pools and birdbaths).
- Keep the grass around your home trimmed.

For more information about West Nile virus, contact Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/wnv.

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